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PHILOSOPHICAL MONISM:
A STUDY OF THE ADVAITA VEDANTA

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1972

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read,
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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

ABSTRACT

The principal aim of this work is to discuss in some detail the main concepts of the Advaita Vedanta (N), the Monistic or Non-Dualistic school of thought in Indian Philosophy.

In Section I a brief general outline of Indian Philosophy is given, in which some fundamental differences between Eastern and Western philosophy are pointed out. The general development of Indian Philosophy is discussed, from the Vedas as its source to the six Darshanas (philosophical systems), which constitute Indian Philosophy today.

Section II is concerned with the Vedanta system. A short outline of its historical development is offered, pointing out its triple basis, the Upanishads, the Vedanta Sutra by Badarayana and the Bhagavadgita. In the latter part of Section II the two main branches of Monism and Monotheism in the Vedanta system are discussed and compared.

Section III begins with an outline of the structure of reality as viewed by the proponents of the Advaita Vedanta system. The question of Knowledge, which is paramount to the Advaita view of reality, is discussed next. The Advaita Vedanta avails itself of six means or

methods of knowledge (pramanas). Central to the Advaita Vedanta system are the concepts of Brahman, Atman, Maya and Moksha. These are considered at some length in the second part of Section III, along with the equally important practical spiritual disciplines of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. The section concludes with some consideration given to ethical principles and their importance to the Advaitan's view of reality.

In the last Section the value of the Advaita Vedanta system for the Western philosopher is discussed. Three points are mentioned as worthy of consideration: the Advaitan philosopher's view of knowledge, his use of language and his spiritually and individually oriented view of life.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude, first of all to my husband, Sepp, for his support and patience.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. M.H. Kelley for his encouragement and skillful guidance and to the members of the Committee, Profs. K.D. Prithipaul and H. Tennessen for their advice.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. N. Michael for his friendship and wise counsel.

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I. INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

From the beginning of human existence there was an innate hunger in the human heart to know and understand what lies beyond the phenomenal world. Each man in his own way and according to his own capacity attempted to bridge the gap between what appears, that is, the phenomenal world and that which is other than phenomenal, meaning the reality which Kant called Noumenal, Hegel called Absolute and Jaspers called Transcendenz. It is perhaps this urge that gave rise to philosophy, the etymological meaning of which is "love of learning" or "the seeking of wisdom". Philosophy presupposes a natural and necessary urge in man to know himself and the world in which he lives.

The solutions, explanations and theories offered by man are many and they range from simple superstitions to most subtle and elaborate philosophical speculations; from primitive animistic views to complicated scientific theories. But no matter how simple or how complicated our explanations may be, questions concerning the nature of reality, human existence, pleasure and pain, good and evil and freedom, still remain open to investigation. The answers given by the most able thinkers in the world, though logical and perhaps even correct, somehow refuse to satisfy the spirit

of man. Neither primitive man, who was unable to see beyond the physical manifestations of natural forces, nor the present scientist, who examines matter with a microscope, or splits the atom or enables us to travel to the moon, can lift the veil. Mystery still remains.

Is there really a mystery, or does it only manifest itself as such due to our inability to recognize a deeper reality, because we have limited our faculty of knowing to sense perception and the understanding of the mind? Is it perhaps possible that we, specifically in the West, have neglected, in fact repudiated, the ability to know by other means? It seems that all Western thought is based on the preconceived notion that man cannot know metaphysical truths by direct experience and therefore these can be only speculations, inferences or ungrounded faith. Unlike the West, the Orient accepts the possibility of knowing the deeper reality by direct experience.

This is probably the most basic difference between Western and Indian philosophy. While the former is primarily an intellectual quest for truth, the latter includes an intense spirituality and emphasizes the need for a practical realization of truth. Indian philosophy is to be viewed as an art of life, a means for man to attain his highest

aspirations and not only as a theory about the universe. Philosophy in India is considered to be one of life's most noble pursuits. Though its wisdom is attainable by few, it ought to be the aspiration of all. Philosophy must take nothing for granted. It must be capable of explaining all things "from the Great Absolute to a blade of grass". (1). Interpretation of reality as perceived by the senses is not enough. Both sides of reality must be examined: the changeable and the unchangeable, the being and the becoming, the permanent and the not permanent, the animate and the inanimate. The aim of philosophy must be to unite into a harmonious whole any differences that may arise from overemphasis of one or the other of these opposed aspects.

According to Indian tradition there is only one Ultimate Reality, but this reality is interpreted by a number of systems or Darshanas. The word Darshana means "vision" and also the "means of vision". (2). It comes from the root "drsh" which means "to see" and "is the Sanskrit term used for philosophy" (3). Sharma says that it stands "for the direct, immediate and intuitive insight into Reality and Truth and also includes the means which lead to this realization." (4).

Systematization was a reaction to Buddhism. The revolt

of Buddhism was very important to Indian thought, since it helped to bring about a critical point of view. While the presystematic period did set down some general reflections regarding the nature of reality as a whole, its medium was poetry and religion. The Buddhistic revolt, characterized by logic and criticism, challenged the old tradition and revealed the need for critical analysis. But the great thinkers of that age soon realized that intellectual quest is not sufficient to feed the spirit of man.

If a philosophy is to endure it must be grounded in something that is unassailable. Thus assailed reason found refuge in faith and strenuous attempts were made to justify by reason what faith implicitly accepted. Since philosophy is only an attempt to interpret the broadening experience of humankind, this attitude is not irrational, as some may argue. Of course, one must avoid the danger of permitting faith to supply the conclusions to philosophy. The Indian philosophers had the courage to meet this challenge. The result was one discipline called "philosophy" as compared to the West where two disciplines pertaining to this subject developed, namely theology and philosophy. As Max Mueller says, philosophy in India is looked upon as a natural outcome of religion.

"Whether religion leads to philosophy, or philosophy to religion, in India the two are inseparable, and they would never have been separated with us, if the fear of men had not been greater than the fear of God or of Truth." (5)

The Vedas

The Vedas, dating back to c.1500 B.C., are the oldest scriptures of the Aryan culture. Veda, which means knowledge, is based on "Shruti", which means "that which is heard". Since there are no chronological records of those times, little can be said about the authors or about the manner in which those bits and pieces of the Vedas were gathered. One could, however, assume that the "seers" or rather the "hearers" of the Vedic period imparted that which they heard to others and this was passed on only to the chosen few.

The Vedas are divided into four sections:

1. The Samhitas, which are a collection of hymns, sacrificial prayers and incantations.
2. The Brahmanas, which are mostly a collection of explanations of sacred rituals.
3. The Aranyakas, the book of the forest dwellers. In the Aranyakas ritual seems to disappear and its place is taken by meditation upon things of nature.
4. The last section, the Upanishads, is the philosophical

part of the Vedas. The scattered monistic ideas of the Samhitas, which were neglected in the Brahmanas, due to overemphasis on ritualistic sacrifices, were developed in the Upanishads.

The accumulated wisdom of the Vedas was chosen as the foundation of the six main Darshanas.

The Sutras

The main principles of the Darshanas are stated in Sutras, which are short aphorisms. They are very concise, avoiding all unnecessary repetition and employing a rigid economy of words. The form in which they were written had, no doubt, something to do with emphasizing essential meanings and avoiding errors. It must be remembered that most writers of the Sutras had to rely on memory. The disadvantage was that the Sutras were difficult to understand without commentaries.

It is assumed that the Darshanas and the Sutras developed approximately during the same period. The Sutras are not the work of one man or one age, but of a number of men spread over several generations. The Darshanas also presuppose a period of development. At a particular stage of their development they were, no doubt, reduced to Sutras and later still were succeeded by commentaries. The

commentaries are often written in the form of dialogues, whereby the commentator is able to show the relation of his views to those of rival commentators and rival schools of thought or Darshanas. It is generally assumed that the Sutras and the Darshanas belong to the same period.

The Darshanas

The Darshanas have many characteristics in common. They all accept the Vedas, though their interpretation of various terms differs. All systems subject the spiritual experiences recorded in the Vedas to a reasoned criticism. The question of valid means of knowledge is an important part of each Darshana. Though each system has its own theory of knowledge, experience, inference and the Vedas are accepted by all as valid means of gaining knowledge. Since life cannot be fully comprehended by reason, it is subordinated to intuition. Self-consciousness is not considered to be the highest state of which man is capable. There is something transcending the consciousness of self. This state, which is difficult to describe is often called "super-consciousness". Super-consciousness is a further step in man's development.

Another common characteristic is the view that the universe is eternally reborn. Vast periods of creation

maintenance and dissolution follow one another in endless succession. Though the old universe is dissolved, its continuity is preserved.

All Darshanas share the belief that the universe is a law-abiding complex. Within the limitations of the universal law man is free to shape his own destiny. Like the universe, man goes through the cycles of creation, maintenance, dissolution and rebirth, but, being self-conscious, he is responsible for his own destiny. One single life is but one step on the road of self or soul development. Death is not an end, but only the beginning of a new step. The development of the soul is a continuing process, though it is broken into stages by recurring birth and death.

The Darshanas which constitute Indian philosophy today are: the Nyaya, the Vaisheshika, the Samkhya, the Yoga, the Purva Mimamsa and the Vedanta.

The Nyaya represents the analytical investigation of the subjects and objects of human knowledge. The word "Nyaya" means "going into the subject" (6), that is, examining or investigating the subject by means of logic. The Nyaya is also called the "Tarkavidya", which means the science of reasoning or of discussion. "Tarka" means logic. The

system is predominantly intellectual, analytical and logical. The founder of the Nyaya system was Gautama and he lived c.550 B.C.

While the Nyaya concerns itself with logic and epistemology, the Vaisheshika concerns itself with the analysis of experience. It is considered to be a philosophy of distinctions. Its name is derived from the word "vishesa", which means particularity, or rather "the characteristics that distinguish a particular thing from all other things". (7). The founder of the Vaisheshika was Kanada.

The Samkhya is considered to be the oldest system of Indian philosophy. It is predominantly intellectual and theoretical. It substitutes evolution for creation and maintains a clear-cut dualism between Spirit (Purusha) and Matter (Prakrti).

The meaning of Purusha is "cosmic spirit". It accounts for the subjective aspect of nature and is the ultimate principle that regulates and directs the process of cosmic evolution. Prakrti means "cosmic substance" or "primal nature". It is the uncaused cause of all phenomenal existence; the primary source of all things.

The Samkhya restricts its inquiry to the evolution of the cosmos and the role of Purusha in that evolution. The

world is not the act of a Creator, but is the product of the interaction between countless Purushas and the ever active Prakrti. Tradition claims that the founder of Samkhya is Kapila, possibly a mythical figure, who, it is said, lived in the 6th or 7th century B.C.

Closely associated with the Samkhya is the system of Yoga. Samkhya stresses theoretical knowledge, while Yoga stresses practical activity. Some philosophers treat the Samkhya and the Yoga as the theoretical and the practical sides of the same system. Yoga is the "spiritual effort to attain perfection through the control of the body, senses and mind, and through right discrimination between Purusha and Prakrti". (8). According to its founder, Patanjali, perfection is attained through the control of different elements of human nature, both physical and psychical. "The physical body, the active will and the understanding mind are to be brought under control." (9) It should be noted that though Patanjali is the founder of the Yoga system, the discipline of Yoga was practised long before he lived and its source is not known.

The Purva Mimamsa concerns itself with the investigation of the ritualistic part of the Veda, in which attention is given to the Dharma. Dharma means "the law". In a

metaphysical sense it means the law of nature, which sustains the operation of the universe. On the individual, human level, Dharma refers to that code of conduct, which sustains the soul and produces virtue. The Purva Mimamsa is very important to Indian religion, since it interprets the scriptures that govern the daily life of most Indians. Modern Indian law is also greatly influenced by this system. The founder of the Purva Mimamsa was Jaimini. Apparently he was a pupil of Badarayana, the founder of the Vedanta. It is assumed that he lived sometime between 600 and 200 B.C.

II. THE VEDANTA SYSTEM

The Vedanta system deserves closer attention, not only because of its philosophical value, but also because it is very closely related to the religion of India. In either form, philosophical or religious, the Vedanta determines the "Weltanschauung" of most Indian thinkers of today.

The term "Vedanta" (Veda + anta) literally means the "end of the Vedas". In a less literal sense it means the culmination of knowledge derived from the Vedas. The Upanishads, embodying the revealed truths (Shruti), are considered to be the primary source of the Vedanta. Though philosophical in nature, they lack philosophical rigour and discipline. As a rule, the seers did not reason or argue for or against a particular point of view. They merely passed on what was revealed to them. The need to systematize the Upanishads arose much later. There were, it is assumed, several such attempts at systematizing the Upanishads, but the only available work today is the Brahma or Vedanta Sutra by Badarayana, written c. 550 B.C. The Vedanta Sutra presents the philosophical argumentation for the positions in the Upanishads. It forms the basis of the Vedanta system as a reasoned philosophy. Another source of the Vedanta is the Bhagavadgita, which concerns itself primarily

with the practical application of the Upanishadic teachings. It emphasizes spiritual and moral disciplines for different types of individuals. The Upanishads, the Vedanta Sutra and the Bhagavadgita are the triple basis of the Vedanta system. The first is related to revelation, the second to reason and the third to the regulation of life.

Broadly speaking the Vedanta philosophy is divided into two main branches: the Monistic or Non-Dualistic branch (Advaita) and the Monotheistic branch. While each branch is primarily an interpretation of the Vedanta Sutra, it is also supported by commentaries on the Upanishads and the Bhagavadgita.

The earliest philosopher of the Advaita is Gaudapada, who lived c. 7th century A.D. His exposition of the Mandukya Upanishad is the first available systematic presentation of the main principles of the Advaita school. He, it is said, was the teacher of Shankara, who is the greatest exponent of the Advaita. The present schools of the Advaita are based on Shankara's commentary on the Vedanta Sutra. There is some disagreement as to when Shankara lived. According to orthodox views it is assumed that he lived sometime at the end of the 6th century. Modern history, however, maintains that it was between 788 and 820 A.D.

Along with the commentaries on the principal Upanishads, the Vedanta Sutra and the Bhagavadgita, he wrote numerous works, both prose and poetry. All this he accomplished within a short life of 32 years. To quote Radhakrishnan,

"It is impossible to read Samkara's writings, packed as they are with serious and subtle thinking, without being conscious that one is in contact with a mind of a very fine penetration and profound spirituality.".. "His philosophy stands forth complete, needing neither a before nor an after."..... ".....whether we agree or differ, the penetrating light of his mind never leaves us where we were." (10)

There are a number of Monotheistic schools. Among these two should be mentioned: the Vishistadvaita founded by Ramanuja (1017 - 1137 A.D.) and the Dvaita founded by Madhva (1199 - 1276 A.D.).

According to the Advaita Vedanta the Nirguna Brahman, which is attributeless and without any differentiation whatsoever, is the sole reality. In the Monotheistic schools the Saguna Brahman is the fundamental reality. Saguna Brahman is the source of all blessed qualities. He is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent supreme Being. The individual selves and the inanimate world are distinct from the supreme Being, but have no existence apart from Him. While the Advaita Vedanta recognizes the position of the Monotheistic claim, it does not consider it ultimate. It

maintains an essential identity between the individual selves and Brahman. Furthermore, the Advaita advocates the path of knowledge (jnana) as the approach to ultimate reality, while the Monotheistic schools advocate the path of devotion (bhakti). Necessary to both approaches is the path of selfless work (karma). The path of knowledge is strictly speaking the search for Nirguna Brahman, while the path of devotion is the search for Saguna Brahman. Here too the Advaita recognizes the Monotheistic position, but not as a final spiritual course. It maintains that the path of devotion leads to the path of knowledge, but the latter is the only way to the realization of Nirguna Brahman.

To put it differently, the Advaita maintains that individual selves and ultimate reality are identical. It further maintains that to recognize this oneness, we must follow the path of knowledge. The Monotheists hold, that individual selves are distinct from ultimate reality, but dependent upon it. They also claim that in order to achieve a state of contentment the seeker must comply with certain devotional practices.

III. THE ADVAITA VEDANTA

A better understanding of the main concepts of the Advaita Vedanta obviously presupposes an understanding of Advaitan epistemology. Before we discuss the basis and the various methods of knowledge, however, it would be helpful if we looked at the structure of reality as a whole, as conceived by the Advaita Vedanta. The concepts noted here will be elaborated on later.

First we must understand that all reality is One. The differences that we perceive are due to ignorance or inability to perceive correctly (Maya), which, however, can be transcended by correct knowledge. Maya projects an apparent, a phenomenal reality, in which we as subjects stand in relation to reality as manifold object. As long as Maya persists, we perceive the phenomenal world as real. Once we transcend Maya, that is, once we have correct knowledge, the world which we previously held to be real, becomes phenomenal, dual, relative and unreal. Once Maya is removed distinctions cease to exist. The stone, the tree, the dog, the star, God and I are One. For the Advaitan this is the culmination of all knowledge.

As we can see, reality bears two aspects, the Absolute and the Relative. The realization of one or the other aspect

depends on the individual's knowledge, along with other factors. The notions of Nirguna Brahman and Atman (Absolute Reality and Absolute Self or Soul) in the absolute aspect, have their corresponding counterparts, namely Saguna Brahman or Ishvara (the Lord) and jiva (the empirical self or ego) in the relative aspect. These realities are One, but are separated by Maya. Central to removing Maya is knowledge.

Now we have returned where we started out, namely at the question: What is Knowledge? Knowledge is not merely based on physical and psychical foundations. Though these are recognized and noted as necessary to the process of knowing, they are not its source. In order for knowledge to exist a metaphysical foundation is required. This metaphysical foundation is Pure Consciousness, beyond the relativity of the knower and the known. This consciousness is prior to every form of existence. While it illuminates all objects, it is self-luminous and self-existent. Pure Consciousness is identical with Pure Being and with Ultimate Reality. It is non-dual, non-relational, but makes possible relational knowledge through a mental mode of the cognizer, the knowing self. In other words, Pure Consciousness is individualized as the knowing self, which becomes manifest through a particular mode of mind characterized by "I-ness".

The point to be made here is that the ground of all knowledge is self-luminous, self-existent Pure Consciousness.

The Advaita Vedanta proposes six distinct means of valid knowledge (pramanas), some of which are unfamiliar to the Western reader. They are: perception, inference, comparison, postulation, non-apprehension and verbal testimony. (11)

According to the Advaita Vedanta all knowledge is revelatory. Its function is to present the object, not to represent it. Each pramana has its limitation. They do not contradict one another. Perception is a means of direct cognition. Inference, comparison and postulation are the means of indirect cognition and are dependent on sense perception. Non-apprehension is the means by which the non-existence of an object or an attribute is known. It is a unique method and not related to the ones already mentioned. Verbal testimony conveys knowledge of the sensible and supra-sensible universe, such as God, Soul and Truth. The intuitive, immediate apprehension of ultimate reality is not considered a means of knowledge, but rather its supreme end. There are difficulties interpreting each of the pramanas, but I shall not take issue with the difficulties in this work.

Perception

Perception is the only means of direct knowledge of physical objects and mental states. There are two kinds of perception, external and internal. Sense perception is external, while mental perception, that is, perception of pain or pleasure, of knowledge or ignorance, of love or hate, is internal. We can apprehend two orders of fact at one and the same time. On the one hand we perceive external objects and events and on the other hand internal states and functions. External objects are perceived by all, while internal occurrences are subjective and private. Both orders appear to us as equally real, but there is a distinction. While external perception relates to physical objects, internal perception relates to psychical occurrences.

Internal perception relates to the perceiving self as well as to the states of mind, which are the things perceived. There is, however, a distinction between the perceiver and the perceived. While we can objectify our various states of mind, such as for example joy or sorrow, we cannot objectify the perceiving self. This self, referred to as Atman, can only be realized through immediate, intuitive experience, which is considered to be the culmination of knowledge. Neither perception, nor any other pramana can apprehend the

Atman. The pramanas are only helpful in the development toward the realization of Atman, but are not directly instrumental in the attainment of the Atmanic consciousness. Due, however, to man's inherent ignorance (Maya), the Atman is identified with the body, the sense organs and the mind. This is to say, for example, that I, the experiencer, the knower, the thinker do not distinguish my Self (Atman) from the thing that I experience, know or think. This identified self, the empirical self or ego, however, is not the Atman.

Another important notion in the Advaitan view of perception is the conception of sense organs. A distinction is made between the gross physical or motor sense organs (eyes, ears, nose, etc.) on the one hand and the actual organs of sight, hearing, smell, etc., on the other hand. These actual sense organs, which are called "indriyas", are located in the subtle body of which the mind is the main component factor. The motor organs are the channels or vehicles of the indriyas, which, with the mind form the empirical self (jiva).

This conception of sense organs is interesting, because, in my opinion, it explains the controversial subject of extra-sensory perception. According to the Advaita Vedanta extra-sensory perception seems to be a case of perception,

but by no means "extra" sensory. The subtle substance of the indriyas and the mind differs from the grosser, denser substance of the body. Due to its nature, it is more flexible and freer than the physical body and this enables it to project itself outside of the body. In other words, the indriyas move more freely and can therefore by-pass the fixed motor sense organs.

The Advaitan view of perception raises many interesting points. The most important point for our purposes, however, is the clear-cut distinction between the perceiving self (Atman) on one hand and the objects of perception and the mind with the sense organs, on the other hand. While perception is impossible without all of these factors, the perceiving self alone is intrinsically luminous. The other factors are devoid of consciousness.

Inference, Comparison, Postulation and Non-Apprehension

Knowledge of the physical reality by inference, comparison and postulation is based on sense perception and therefore is indirect or mediate. The primary source of knowledge of the physical reality is sense perception and the secondary sources are inference, comparison and postulation. Since these are all dependent on sense perception, their scope is limited to phenomenal reality.

The Sanskrit term for inference is "anumana", which literally means "knowing after" or "consequent knowledge". It should, however, be kept in mind, that the meaning of "anumana" is somewhat different from what is meant by "inference". Anumana is the method by which knowledge is derived from the knowledge of an invariable relation between what is perceived and what is deduced. The Sansrit term for this invariable relation is "vyapti", which means extension or pervasion. Vyapti is what Western logicians call "invariable concomitance". The Advaita Vedanta uses anumana to confirm the truths declared by the Shruti. Reflection on the dicta revealed by the Shruti helps one to grasp their true significance, by removing one's doubts and misconceptions regarding them and by reconciling certain apparent contradictions in them. Reflection also helps towards the next step in the process of self-realization, namely meditation. The three steps toward self-realization are hearing what the Vedas reveal, reflection on them and meditation.

Comparison or "upamana" is defined as the instrument of the valid knowledge of similarity. The Advaita Vedanta regards it as a distinct method of mediate knowledge. It is unlike anumana and perception. In the Advaitan view

comparison is "the process by which the knowledge of A's similarity to B is gained from the perception of B's similarity to A, which has been perceived elsewhere." (12)

For example, I have a German Shepherd dog by the name of Prince at home. I spot a wolf in the forest and perceive the similarity between the wolf and Prince. This is the judgment I form: "this wolf is like my Prince". From this experience I gain the additional knowledge of "Prince is like this wolf". In other words, the means by which I gain the knowledge of Prince's similarity to the wolf is from the perception of the wolf's similarity to Prince.

Comparison serves as the means of both, similarity and dissimilarity. In the latter sense it is used to convey a kind of knowledge of ultimate reality. For example, Atman is declared to be different from the body in every respect, so that we may comprehend its nature by contrast. While the body is mortal, impure, changeable, gross and devoid of consciousness, the Atman is immortal, pure, changeless, subtle and conscious.

The Sanskrit word for postulation is "arthapatti", which means supposition or presumption of fact. It is the method of assumption of an unknown fact in order to account for a known fact that cannot be otherwise accounted

for. For example, from the knowledge that a fat person does not eat during the day, we can assume that he eats at night, otherwise his fatness cannot be explained. Another example, a drunk man is not drinking in my presence. Since he is drunk, I can assume that he drank before he came to see me or else the fact that he is drunk remains unexplained. We may use postulation when there is only one explanation of the fact to be explained. For example, when a living person is not at home, the only alternative explanation is that he is somewhere else. Postulation, therefore, cannot determine the existence of nature or God. Even if we recognize the universe as a creation, its existence can have more than one explanation.

The method of non-apprehension or "anupalabdhi" is a unique and the sole means to direct knowledge of the non-existence of perceptible objects and their attributes. It is the absence of an object or of the attributes of an object from their place or locus that is known by non-apprehension. Such statements as "there is no jar on the floor" or "the flower has no fragrance" are examples of non-apprehension. Not every case of non-apprehension is considered proof of non-existence. Non-apprehension must be appropriate and correct. For example, if I do not see a chair in a dark room there is no proof that the chair is

not there, or my lack of awareness of Atman does not prove that there is no Atman. These then are no cases of appropriate non-apprehension. The condition of the locus must be the same for both my apprehension of something if it were there and my non-apprehension of it, if it were not there.

Verbal Testimony

The Advaitans as well as other Indian philosophers attempted to establish verbal testimony, "shabda", as an ultimate source of knowledge, in order to uphold the authority of all scriptures in general and of the Vedas in particular. It might be of interest to note at this point, that the main difference between Eastern and Modern Western philosophies lies in the latter's non-acceptance of the authority of scriptures.

"Modern Western philosophy had its birth in the revolt of reason against authority, and the word 'authority' has thereby acquired such a repellent association of exploded medievalism that when we come across any attempt to justify the infallibility of authority of any kind we can hardly overcome our preliminary reluctance coolly to reconsider the merits of a case on which an adverse judgment was passed long, long ago, which has also been since upheld by the silent assent of the centuries that have followed. So a discussion of the shabda-pramana of Indian philosophy seems to be foredoomed to neglect and ridicule." (13)

In its widest sense "shabda" means "sound". In a narrower

sense it means a sound used as a symbol for the expression of some meaning, or, in short, "word". In the present context "shabda" means verbal expression as the source of knowledge. It corresponds to "authority" or "testimony". It is also called "apta-vakya", which means "the statement of a trustworthy person", or "agma", which means "authentic word".

Verbal testimony is a separate means of knowledge, because it does not depend solely on sense perception and the mediate methods dependent on it. When we hear or read a statement, it conveys much more than meets the ears or eyes. Mere hearing or reading will not project the meaning. The meaning of a statement depends on context. For example, the statement "I see the light" may mean one thing when one enters a dark room and another thing when one grasps an idea for the meaning of which one was searching. While other means of knowledge acquaint us with the facts of the sensible reality, verbal testimony is an instrument of both, sensuous and supra-sensuous truths. That is to say, it also communicates such notions as God, soul, life after death and others.

Verbal knowledge as a method is distinct from perceptual and inferential knowledge. The fact that the "hill is on

fire" can be known in three different ways. Through perception, by actually seeing the fire on the hill; through inference by seeing the smoke and inferring fire from the knowledge of vyapti and through verbal testimony by hearing the report that there is a fire on the hill. While perceptual knowledge is derived from direct cognition of the object (fire) and inferential knowledge results from the apprehension of vyapti (smoke-fire), verbal knowledge depends on the comprehension of the meaning of words and their relation.

Knowledge gained from verbal testimony is not merely unfounded belief, because the statements coming from a trustworthy authority carry conviction without proof. There is no need for verification. The conviction is neither due to credulity or gullibility, nor to feeling, volition, imagination or assumption. It is grounded in reason. "It is not unreasonable to rely on the reliable." (14)

Verification, the Advaitan says, is needed for removal of doubt and not for establishing knowledge. There are countless examples in everyday life of verbal testimony as a valid means of knowledge. We say, for example, "I do not know him/her" if we have not met and talked with the person in question. Does that not imply that we heavily rely on the

person's self-disclosure, which is primarily based on verbal communication? The use of the word "know" in itself indicates that verbal communication is a valid means of knowledge. Could man rely on any other means of knowledge if he could not trust the validity of the verbal testimony of others?

As was mentioned before, verbal testimony has a twofold capacity. It can communicate facts about the sensible universe and can also serve as a medium of the supra-sensuous and supra-rational experiences of others. The former kind of information is secular and the latter is scriptural. The special purpose of scriptural testimony is to impart truths that are beyond man's normal experience. This does not mean that self-realization results from verbal testimony, or indeed from any other means of knowledge. Self-realization is a unique experience, transcending all knowledge. That is to say, that the man who realizes that he is one with Brahman no longer needs to seek Brahman, either through perception, or by reason, or from any authority. All means of knowledge are helpful, but not conclusive. Even reason, so highly regarded in the West, fails to unveil what is beyond it.

"The field of reason, or of the conscious workings of the mind, is narrow and limited. There is a little

circle within which human reason must move. It cannot go beyond. Every attempt to go beyond is impossible, yet it is beyond this circle of reason that there lies all that humanity holds most dear. All these questions, whether there is an immortal soul, whether there is a God, whether there is any supreme intelligence guiding this universe or not, are beyond the field of reason. Reason can never answer these questions. Yet these questions are so important to us. Without a proper answer to them, human life will be purposeless. All our ethical theories, all our moral attitudes, all that is good and great in human nature, have been molded upon answers that have come from beyond the circle. It is very important, therefore that we should have answers to these questions." (15)

Though verbal testimony cannot offer the supra-rational experience, it precedes it. Before one can develop the intuitive apprehension, one must know about God and the self from the scriptures, from a qualified teacher or from both. This endeavour, in turn, raises a number of questions, such as "where do the scriptures come from?" or "who were the teachers?" In the last resort it is admitted that the "Word" is beginningless, that the first teacher must be Brahman.

Knowledge of the verbal testimony conveyed by the "seers" or "hearers" of the Vedic scriptures serves as a means for the individual to discover the identity of one's phenomenal or relative self with the Noumenal or Absolute, Supreme Self. This transcendent experience is the culmination of all knowledge. It is the final solution of

all problems, the cessation of all doubts and of all ignorance. It is the attainment of Brahman, which is Pure Consciousness-Being-Bliss.

Brahman

Before discussing Brahman, I should like to clarify one important point. Some may ask, why is there a Pantheon if reality is One? It should be understood that the Vedic scriptures address themselves to all human beings as individuals. Each individual must have the opportunity to develop spiritually according to his own capacity. Psychological, sociological as well as geographical and physical conditions differ from individual to individual. Thus each individual has his own spiritual needs. Man's life is a process of becoming, of self-awareness. In this process the self assumes different forms according to the individual spiritual needs. In other words, in the process of self-awareness man identifies with his self in the form of an externalized deity or deities. If and when the individual realizes that he is the Ultimate Reality, the attributeless Supreme Self, Pure Consciousness-Being-Bliss, the self as externalized deity ceases to exist. The gods of the Pantheon are finite, they are, literally, creations in the image of man.

The Advaita Vedanta system appeals to those individuals who no longer are satisfied with finite deities. It advocates the path of knowledge, which involves knowledge of the Vedic scriptures, not merely blind belief. It also advocates reflection on and interpretation of them, not merely rationalization. Once those steps have been accomplished it recommends meditation upon the self, so that the individual may be helped to discover the unity of the self.

We must keep in mind a distinction between two starting points for the explanation of metaphysical reality. One starting point presupposes that man cannot apprehend metaphysical truths by direct intuitive experience, or even granted that he can, no man has so far done so, therefore metaphysical truths are nothing but pure speculations. Furthermore, schools or systems, in the East or West, which engage in these pure speculations, must be mutually contradictory, because if one is true, the others must be false. Most philosophies in the West would, no doubt, start with these presuppositions. The other starting point, from which most Indian thinkers develop their philosophies, presupposes that man can apprehend metaphysical truths intuitively and directly; that there have been such men

(the "seers" or "hearers" of the Vedas), who have done so and that these men have passed on their experience by verbal testimony. Furthermore, though all "seers" apprehend the same truths, just as all men see the same sun, the words they use to explain the experience differ from man to man. Thus, verbal testimony is to be considered an account or, if you will, a translation into words of an experience, which by its nature goes beyond the ordinary experiences of men and which therefore can never be adequately described by words, since they are essentially tools for the description of ordinary experiences. On the other hand, words are man's most sophisticated means of expression and therefore, however inadequate they may be, are still the best tool to relate extra-ordinary experiences. The Indian thinker, you will note, does not demand that the seeker of metaphysical truths believe blindly in the Vedic scriptures. The seeker is only expected to accept their validity as a starting point for his own, individual self-realization. He is to read them or hear them and then to reflect upon them, that is, to think about what is said. Whether he will or will not arrive at a rational conclusion or whether he will or will not have an intuitive experience of his own is left to him.

The Indian thinkers very early recognized the eternal unity of existence. This unity pervades the universe and yet remains beyond it. Everything, animate or inanimate matter, animals, men, angels, gods are included in it. As the unchanging principle behind the universe this unity is called Brahman; as the indestructible spirit, soul or self it is called Atman. Brahman and Atman are identical. The word "Brahman" is derived from the root "brh", which means to grow, to expand, to evolve, to become. Brahman is that which burst forth as nature and soul. It is that from which all beings come, by which they live and into which they are reabsorbed.

The Taittiriya Upanishad II. 1-5 (16) describes this expansion or evolution in terms of five levels or sheaths (koshas). The lowest level is matter. Matter, however, is dead and cannot account for life. It exists purely on a physical plane. The purpose of matter is fulfilled when life evolves. When inert, inorganic matter is transformed into organic matter, we enter the second sheath, namely that of life. We are now on a biological plane. Vegetable life emerges first. The vegetable products must be transformed into animal cells. The destiny of life is fulfilled only when consciousness evolves. Thus the third

sheath is mind or perceptual consciousness. In animals consciousness is manifested through instinct and reflex action. Man is also subject to instinct, but not entirely. His realm is the fourth sheath, that of self-consciousness or reason. It is here that the subject-object duality is manifest. This distinguishes man from the lower animal. On this level the arts, sciences, ethics, religion, philosophy are possible. There is, however, still a higher plane of which we get only occasional glimpses in our phenomenal life and which cannot be accounted for by reason. While reason differentiates, this plane compels to unity. This is the fifth sheath, the plane of non-dual bliss. Here philosophy, science, religion terminate. (See Diagram 1. "Evolution - The Five Koshas" and Diagram 2. "Relationship between Brahman, Knowledge and the Five Koshas"). While Brahman transcends all, it underlies all reality. Matter is not lost in life, nor is life lost in consciousness or mind; mind is not lost in self-consciousness or reason and reason is not lost in bliss.

We might at this point have a closer look at the evolution or development of consciousness, that is, the process from the third to the fifth sheath. (See Diagram 3., "Consciousness"). The first stage of consciousness could be

labeled, for lack of a better word, as "instinct". In the process of development instinct in man differentiates into various other means of apprehension, such as "sense experience", "intellect" and "emotion". It could, however, be said that instinct and the new means overlap, that is, man still falls back on instinct if and when the other means of apprehension neglect to serve him. A further stage of development is that of reason. Neither intellect, nor sense experience, nor emotion alone can qualify man. Somehow all these means of apprehension must be subject to an unifying principle, which we assume is reason. Again there seems to be an overlapping of the various means of apprehension and their unifying principle. That is to say, that I, for example, may today apprehend the world primarily through my senses and secondarily through my intellect or emotions. Tomorrow I may apprehend the world primarily through my emotions and secondarily through my intellect, and so on. If all these fail I may still fall back on my instincts. This then would mean, that though we may assume that all self-conscious beings are potentially rational beings, we may not assume that all self-conscious beings have actually developed this potential. The same could be applied to the next stage of development, namely intuition,

assuming, of course, that we hold that man is an open-ended being and thus subject to further development.

Intuition may indeed be a potential in all men, but developed only by few. Furthermore, many men may indeed experience intuitively, but, since verbal expression is their most sophisticated means of expression, they may have to fall back on the rational means to relate their experiences. Thus reason and intuition may overlap.

We might also keep in mind that, although men who have intuitive experiences are rare, they did exist. Not only those who related the Upanishads, but perhaps also such men as Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammed and possibly others. Though they presumably experienced the same thing, they verbalized the experience in different ways, each in his own language and against his own environmental and cultural background. In spite of individual differences, however, they must have communicated their experiences by other than purely rational means. For how else can we explain the fact that we have elevated such men to the positions of prophets, saints and gods and how else can we explain that the systems they have inadvertently initiated endure to the present and encompass greater numbers of people than those systems initiated by means of reason alone? Perhaps, if we could

return to the state of the pre-historic man, we might find that he, being in the transitional state between instinct and reason, might have believed rational man to be a god. He might have feared and denied, yet revered that which was potentially in him, but of which he was not yet aware in himself. Could it be possible that man today, the rational being, is also in a transitional stage of evolution, between reason and a new development, which we arbitrarily call intuition? If this is so, would we not also be apprehensive of something which is potentially in us and of which we have glimpses, but which we, collectively that is, cannot yet understand? The fifth sheath may well be that next stage of self-development.

Brahman is described as having two aspects. In one of its aspects Brahman is devoid of all attributes and qualifying characteristics; in the other aspect it possesses qualities. The former is called Nirguna (unqualified) Brahman and the latter is called Saguna (full of all good qualities) Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is also referred to as acosmic, indeterminate, indescribable, absolute, while Saguna Brahman is referred to as cosmic, Ishvara (the Lord, God). Saguna Brahman may be conceived as the personal aspect of Nirguna Brahman and Nirguna Brahman as the impersonal

aspect of Saguna Brahman. Shankara in his commentary on the Brahma Sutra I.i.2. states,

"Brahman is apprehended under two forms: in the first place, as qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form; in the second place, as being the opposite of this, that is to say, as being free from all limiting conditions whatever." (17)

The Upanishads refer to the Brahman with attributes as "He" and to the attributeless Brahman as "It".

Nirguna Brahman

Nirguna Brahman cannot be characterized by any marks, qualities or attributes. This is why It is sometimes explained by silence. In describing Nirguna Brahman the Upanishads usually employ the technique of negation, "neti, neti", which means "not this, not this" or "neither this nor that". The "neti, neti" negates all description of Brahman, but not Brahman Itself. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad II.iii.6. states,

"Now, therefore, the description of Brahman: 'not this, not this'; for there is no other and more appropriate description than this 'not this'. Now the designation of Brahman: 'The truth of truth.' The vital breath is truth, and It (Brahman) is the Truth of that." (18)

Brahman, though unknown and unknowable, is the knower of all knowledge and the goal of all knowledge. It is the consciousness that is manifest in all pramanas, but cannot be known by any of them. Brahman is neither subject nor

object. It transcends them both. Nothing can be predicated of It. Brahman is timeless. It is free from any limitations of past, present and future. Sometimes It is described as eternal, having no beginning nor end; and sometimes as momentary, like a flash of lightening or the wink of an eye. Brahman is changeless, thus independent of causality. It is not the creator of the universe, in the sense of a painting being the creation of a painter. Brahman is Itself, causeless.

Since Brahman is not an object, It is indescribable by words and unknowable to the mind. For something to be known and describable it must be made an object of the mind. That, however, which is the substratum of all knowledge and experience cannot itself be an object of knowledge and sense experience. Brahman, however, is real inspite of the negative way of characterizing It. (19) It could be said that Brahman is potentially all that phenomenal reality is, but It is not the reality as it appears to us. To say that Brahman is reality is to say that It is different from the phenomenal, the spatial, the temporal and the sensible world. Brahman is assumed as foundational, though It is not substance. Brahman is not in any one point in space, yet It is everywhere, since all things imply and depend on It. Since It is not an object It has no spatial relations

to anything else and therefore it could be said that Brahman is nowhere. Brahman is not a cause, because It is timeless. Furthermore, we cannot define Brahman, because the words at our disposal refer to things of the phenomenal world. Though we may speak about Brahman, we cannot describe It adequately, that is, in the way we describe phenomenal things, or have any knowledge of It in the same way as we know an occurrence by means of the pramanas (20)

Brahman has neither similarity to anything else, nor differentiation from anything else. All these are empirical distinctions. Since Brahman is opposed to all empirical or phenomenal existence, It can only be described as unlike everything that is empirically known. But It is not non-being. The words used to describe It are negative, but the meaning of Brahman is definitely positive. We cannot say what Brahman is, because this would mean qualifying It in terms of human knowledge. Since we cannot grasp Brahman by empirical knowledge, all we can say about It is what It is not. It transcends the opposition of permanence and change, of One and Many, of the whole and the part, of the relative and the absolute, of the finite and the infinite, all of which are based on the subject-object duality in our apprehension of the universe.

It may well be stated by some, that we seem to get a Brahman in which all is lost; that we end in making Brahman "nothing". Yet the mystic might reply that everything is found. The thought that hesitates to make God determinate, leaves room for improvement, for transcendence of the god created in the image of man. The mystic might well agree with Rudolf Otto, who says:

"This negative theology does not mean that faith and feeling are dissipated and reduced to nothing; on the contrary, it contains within it the loftiest spirit of devotion..... A conception negative in form may often become the symbol for a content of meaning which, if absolutely unutterable, is none the less in the highest degree positive....." (21)

Saguna Brahman

For the sake of the mass of humanity the scriptures describe Brahman as having positive qualities. As an interpreter of the Upanishads, Shankara was obliged to reconcile the positive and negative descriptions of Brahman.

"Thus we are committed to the view according to which there are two types of Brahman, the lower and the higher. It is the higher Brahman which, when the distinctions of names and forms are negated, is described only negatively, as neither coarse nor subtle, and so on. And that it is the lower Brahman which is qualified by some name and form, for the purpose of meditation." (22)

Nirguna Brahman becomes Saguna when conditioned by ignorance (maya). That is to say, that we see Brahman manifest as

God, soul and the world, due to the modes of apprehension peculiar to man. Saguna Brahman is the Personal God. Creation, preservation and destruction are His activities. He is the God of actions and deeds. Yet Nirguna and Saguna Brahman are not two distinct realities. The sea whether peaceful or stormy still remains the sea. Shankara regarded Saguna Brahman, commonly referred to as Ishvara (the Lord, God), as the supreme personality. He is an "empirical postulate, which is practically useful." (23) He knows all and possesses all powers.

In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (24), it is said that nature is the body of God (Ishvara), who is its soul. Earth, water, fire, air, ether, the sun, the moon, the rivers, the mountains, in fact all beings, all creatures, all life, the senses, speech and minds are the body of God. God is immanent in them all and controls them from within. He knows them all, but they do not know Him, because the body cannot know the soul.

It could be said that Ishvara is the personal aspect of impersonal Brahman. He is the Creator of the world and the Lord of Maya. Brahman is incomprehensible, the one beyond speech and thought. Ishvara is the finite God.

Atman - Jiva

It is difficult to trace the origin of the word "atman", because it is very ancient and from the point of view of historical Sanskrit, it belongs to a pre-historic layer of Sanskrit. (25) Whatever its origin, however, it was used since the Vedic times to express the essence, soul or self of man and that of God.

Reality is usually conceived as Brahman or Atman, depending from which point of view we approach it. When we approach it from the unified point of view we call it Brahman; when we approach it from the individual point of view we call it Atman. For explication see Diagram 1., "Evolution - The Five Koshas" and Diagram 4., "Relationship between Brahman and Atman". They show how reality evolved, how Brahman burst forth from within and scattered, thus creating reality. While Brahman encloses reality, It remains as its center. As the center it is called Atman. Brahman denotes the eternal self or soul of the whole universe, while Atman represents that self within man and each individual being. Atman is the unidentified, attributeless self. It is the immutable witness of physical and psychical events. In the Brihadaranyaka III. iv. 2., It is described as the Self which cannot be apprehended by means of knowledge:

"You cannot see the seer of seeing; you cannot hear the hearer of hearing; you cannot think the thinker of thinking; you cannot know the knower of knowing. This is your self that is within all; everything else but this is perishable." (26)

The concepts of Brahman and Atman are synonymous. The absolute manifests itself as external and internal reality and transcends them both. In this context the individual is no longer individual, but becomes universal. Atman the microcosm and Brahman the macrocosm are blended together.

The Atman is manifest in man as jiva or jiva-atman. This is the empirical or apparent self, which, because of Maya, the veil of ignorance, is alienated from Atman and is identified with the gross body, sense organs and the subtle body of the mind and the indriyas. The jiva becomes particularly manifest through the cognitive mind, which is the main component of the subtle body. It is also called "the reflected self", which being identified with the mind apparently acquires its attributes. Thus Atman-Brahman-Immutable Self-Soul-Pure Consciousness, because of the jiva's ignorance seems to be endowed with attitudes, tendencies and desires, which actually dwell in the mind. Further, being identified with the mind, the jiva is also identified with the gross body and the sense organs. It cognizes agreeable and disagreeable objects, performs good

and evil deeds and experiences pain and pleasure. The jiva is the apparent or empirical self that operates as the cognizer, the doer and the experiencer. But at the back of the jiva is the Atman, the illuminator, the witness of Itself as cognizer, doer and experiencer. There is no duality here. The jiva and Atman are one and only appear to be separate, because of the jiva's lack of awareness of its true and real nature. The jiva finds expression through the ego or "I-ness". It is through "I-ness" that the Atman becomes more or less identified with the mental process and the bodily organs. It is "I-ness" that ties together the conscious spirit and the unconscious matter, the self and the non-self. There is an intermingling of the two. The knower becomes identified with the known and the known with the knower. The light of Atman transmitted through "I-ness" makes the mental states, the sense organs and the body appear to be conscious in themselves.

In the Mandukya Upanishad four states are attributed to jiva and Atman. Three states, waking, dreaming and sound sleep, denote empirical experience and are associated with the jiva. The fourth state "Turiya", denotes a transcendental experience and is associated with Atman. In the waking state the jiva dwells primarily in the physical

body, being identified with it through "I-ness". The body and the organs appear to be conscious in association with the conscious self. It is the waking ego that perceives external objects, performs various deeds and experiences different conditions of life. In the dream state the form of the ego changes. It has no definite shape. There seems to be a lack of volition in the dream state. Though all three states have a common feature, namely absence of awareness of Atman, deep sleep differs from waking and dreaming in that it is associated neither with gross objects nor with subtle impressions, which are the characteristics of the other two states. This state is characterized only by general consciousness, while the other two states are associated with the knowledge of particulars. In deep sleep all diversified experiences of waking and dreaming reach the state of non-discrimination, without, however, losing their peculiar characteristics; just as various objects perceived during the day, lose their diverse appearances when covered by the darkness of night. In deep sleep conflict caused by the subject-object duality is absent. Therefore a person in sound sleep is said to experience bliss in the sense that one who is free from effort is said to be happy. This bliss, however, is quite

different from the Bliss of Brahman-Atman. Bliss in deep sleep is a state of unspecified ignorance. Released from all physical and mental strain, due to its identification with the body, the senses and the mind during waking and dreaming states, the empirical self returns to its own self, but without realizing its true nature as Atmanic consciousness, it lies in blissful ignorance. Though unrealized, Atman is the light that shines as its sole witness. It shines even when the ego subsides. The fourth state, that of transcendence and complete awareness, denotes the unity of Brahman-Atman-jiva. It is described by negation of all attributes.

"Turiya is not that which is conscious of the inner (subjective) world, nor that which is conscious of the outer (objective) world, nor that which is conscious of both, nor that which is a mass of consciousness. It is not simple consciousness nor is It unconsciousness. It is unperceived, unrelated, incomprehensible, uninferable, unthinkable, and indescribable. The essence of the Consciousness manifesting as the self (in the three states), It is the cessation of all phenomena; It is all peace, all bliss, and non-dual. This is what is known as the Fourth (Turiya). This is Atman, and this has to be realized." (27)

As we can read, the state of Turiya is not subject to knowledge in empirical terms. No language can properly describe It, because It is devoid of any attributes and characteristics used by man.

We have so far discussed four of the central principles on which the Advaita Vedanta builds its thought. The two absolute principles of Brahman and Atman and the two relative principles of Saguna Brahman or Ishvara and jiva. We have also stated that there is only an apparent distinction between these principles and in reality they are one. The distinction occurs due to the veil of ignorance or nescience, which is the cause of inapprehension as well as misapprehension of reality and of the self.

Maya/Avidya

The Advaita Vedanta could be summarized in one short paragraph: Brahman is the only reality; the phenomenal world is ultimately unreal; the jiva and Atman are ultimately identical and Atman and Brahman are synonymous. The phenomenal world exists due to Maya. The jivas, because of their inherent Avidya (individual ignorance) are estranged from Brahman and identify with the phenomenal world, believing it to be Brahman. Like someone, due to poor eyesight, may mistake a rope for a snake, so the jiva mistakes Brahman for the phenomenal world, due to ignorance.

"Maya" and "Avidya" are two of the terms used for "ignorance". Broadly speaking the former term refers to cosmic ignorance, while the latter term refers to individual

ignorance or the ignorance of man. The general trend of the Advaitans, including Shankara, has been to treat these two terms as synonymous, but to distinguish two aspects of Maya/Avidya. In one of its aspects it refers to the concealment of Brahman-Atman and in the other it refers to the projection of the phenomenal world.

It is difficult to explain the function of Maya/Avidya, unless one uses an example. Let us compare the function of Maya/Avidya to my experience when viewing a movie. Let us say for the moment that the moviehouse and the chair in which I sit are comparable to the reality of Brahman-Atman and that the movie which I experience is comparable to the phenomenal world. While the movie is in progress, I am not aware that I sit in a particular chair, in a particular cinema, located in a particular place. I, in fact, participate in the action on the screen without awareness of my environment. As long as I am completely involved in the action on the screen, reality is concealed. The action on the screen, in which I fully participate, since this is the reason for my being there in the first place, is quite real to me as long as I and the projection on the screen are one. My surroundings, though not completely obliterated, recede somehow. They are there like a shadow or darkness, offering

a kind of security, a kind of comfort, but their features and functions are not distinct. The experience of the drama or comedy on the screen cannot be called an illusion. It is quite real. I weep or laugh or am angry, depending on the plot. I experience the projection as real, because I am not impartial to it. Further, while I experience the projection, I am not aware or only vaguely aware of the source of the projection. Only when I shift my awareness from the projection to reality, do I realize that the source of the projection, the projection, myself, the location, etc., are of the same reality.

A similar case can be made for the reality of Brahman-Atman and that of the phenomenal world. While man lives, acts, participates in phenomenal life, the essential nature of reality is concealed by Maya/Avidya. He lives in its projection. The harder he strives to satisfy his physiological and psychological needs, the less he is aware of the spiritual reality, though it is there all the time. If and when, however, he chooses to shift his awareness to spiritual matters, he eventually realizes, by inquiry and through reflection, that he, Brahman-Atman and Maya/Avidya are of the same reality. One could say that Maya/Avidya is a positive force, insofar as it projects a world which

can be experienced and known by man's psycho-physical abilities. In this sense the phenomenal world is like a discipline, which we may choose to impose on ourselves in order to exercise the mentioned abilities. But we must also not get too identified with this particular discipline or else we lose sight of who we really are.

Shankara (28) brings out the following characteristics of Maya/Avidya:

1. It is something unconscious, neither real nor independent, as contrasted with Brahman, which is Pure Consciousness.
2. It is an inherent power or potency of Brahman. The relationship between Brahman and Maya/Avidya is unique. It is neither identity nor difference nor both. Maya/Avidya acts as a means of projecting a manifold world, which has its ground in Brahman. Like Brahman, Maya/Avidya is beginningless.
3. It is something positive, though not real. It is called positive in order to emphasize the fact that it is not merely negative. In its negative aspect it conceals reality and acts as a screen to hide it. In its positive aspect it projects the world of plurality. It is not real, because it has no existence apart from Brahman, yet it is not unreal, because it projects the world of appearances. It is not real because it vanishes

when awareness is shifted from it to reality, yet it is not unreal, because we experience it as real as long as we participate in it.

4. It has a phenomenal and relative character. It is an appearance only.
5. It is "adhyasha", which means "superimposition", that is, superimposition of an object and its attributes on the subject and vice versa. Like, for example, the superimposition of the projection on the screen on my reality. According to Shankara, the subject and the object are absolutely opposed to one another, like light and darkness. The subject is Brahman-Pure Consciousness-Self; the object is unconsciousness or non-self. Yet it is natural and common for man to superimpose one upon the other. This co-mingling of the subject and object, this mixing of truth and error, this coupling of the real and unreal is called "adhyasha". Adhyasha is the notion of a thing in something else, as for example, of reality in the projection on the screen, or of a snake in a rope.
6. Maya/Avidya is removable by realization that the subject is subject and the object is object. For example, when the rope is known the snake that we perceived in the rope vanishes.

Another way of looking at Maya/Avidya is in terms of knowledge. Maya/Avidya is both, absence of knowledge, as well as positive, though wrong or erroneous knowledge. By "absence of knowledge", I mean here, apprehending a thing that does not exist, for example an Unicorn. Positive, wrong knowledge means mistaking one thing for another, as in the example of the rope and the snake. It is positive knowledge, because we apprehend the phenomenal world as real, but it is wrong knowledge, because it distorts the reality of Brahman. Positive right knowledge is the apprehension of Brahman. While Maya/Avidya conceals positive, right knowledge, it creates, through projection, the kind of knowledge that is necessary for man's phenomenal existence. In this sense then, wrong knowledge is positive. Without Maya/Avidya there would be no purpose for a phenomenal existence. The concealed seems non-existent and unreal as long as one has no right knowledge. Once right knowledge is attained, that which was concealed by Maya/Avidya becomes real and existent. That which was projected, however, appears real and existent as long as one has wrong knowledge. Once right knowledge is attained, the phenomenal becomes unreal and non-existent. Maya/Avidya vanishes with the dawn of right knowledge.

In summary, Maya/Avidya should not be thought of as a theory or explanation of the world, but rather as a hypothesis, which attempts to reconcile the direct, mystic experience of the One Reality, Brahman, with the empirical experience of plurality. It is the relative link between absolute being and utter non-being. In other words, Maya/Avidya represents the answer to: how the infinite became the finite. It is the screen through which we see the infinite as finite.

Moksha

A very important notion connected with the Advaita Vedanta system is that of "Moksha", which means "liberation". Moksha is neither what we mean by "freedom", nor is it what we call "salvation". Freedom in our terms is a qualified freedom and therefore it is limited. It may be construed as either social, economic, individual, divine, or some other kind of freedom. When we speak of freedom, we speak of exchanging one phenomenal situation for another. For example, we say that in order to be free of poverty, we must change the situation to one of financial security or to one of better education; to be free of tyranny, we must abolish one type of government for another; to attain divine freedom, we must rid ourselves of sin; to become free

individuals, we must change the situation in which we are not free. In other words, freedom in our terms implies changing something outside of ourselves, something that is external, like poverty, tyranny, sin, etc. Salvation also implies something external - an agent. We need a saviour in order to be saved. Christ died on the cross for all us sinners, thereby saving all Christians. The Advaitan would say that this view of freedom and salvation is the result of Maya/Avidya.

Moksha is a state of unqualified freedom. It is a matter of direct realization of something which is existent from eternity, though concealed by Maya/Avidya. When that which conceals it is removed, the soul is liberated. Moksha is the transition from the jiva state to the state of Brahman-Atman. It is not the abolition of selfhood, but rather the awareness of its infinity and absoluteness, by the expansion and illumination of our consciousness. The realization of Moksha is not an objective process by which one destroys one thing in the world in order to create another; nor is it a process whereby one destroys the phenomenal world of plurality. It is rather the shifting of ones own awareness, as for example, the shifting of awareness from the projection on the screen to reality.

It is an insight, whereby the face of the world changes for me. This insight or changed attitude is Moksha. Like the plot on the movie screen, the unending process of life will go on through its ups and downs, but the liberated man's attachment to it is over. On liberation nothing happens to the world, only man's views of it alter. Moksha, then, does not mean the abolition, dissolution or change of the world, but only the disappearance of man's own wrong knowledge.

As we can see, Moksha is an internal and an individual process. Man's attention is not directed toward freeing the world or freeing himself from the world, but rather toward liberating his self from his own misapprehension of reality. The responsibility for liberating one's own self is not the responsibility of the external world. Each individual is responsible for the removal of his own misapprehension of reality; each one is responsible for his own awareness of Brahman-Atman. Not analysis, criticism, understanding and awareness of other people and of their situations, but self-analysis, self-criticism, self-understanding and self-awareness are paramount to the notion of liberation. The emphasis is on relation with one's self rather than relation to an external agent. Removal of ignorance or wrong knowledge begins with removing one's

own ignorance. This does not mean, however, that relationship to other beings is unimportant. It merely means that how we relate to others is a consequence of how we relate to our own selves. To the extent that I understand myself, for example, to that extent I understand someone else. The two relationships are not mutually exclusive. One who develops from within will in some way communicate this to others. Knowing himself to be the agent, Brahman-Atman, the individual strives to develop those virtues that correspond to his view of an ideal value. Thus liberating himself from the phenomenal world also means developing those virtues which we commonly call "good" or "right", to such a point that these are performed without conscious effort and without any expectations. When a man no longer needs to exert himself to perform a good or right action and to have good or right feelings and thoughts, and no longer expects rewards for these, he is said to be liberated.

The process of liberating one's self from error is not limited to one lifetime. For the Advaita, as for other Indian philosophical systems, physical death is not the end of a person. It is merely a transition, a change. We will recall that the process of perception involves the physical senses as well as the indriyas, which are of the same subtle

substance as the mind. While the body at physical death is discarded, the indriyas and the mind remain intact. They comprise one's actions, feelings and thoughts, accumulated throughout many physical lives. The mind and the indriyas assume a new appearance, that is, they are reborn in order to have an opportunity to counteract those actions, feelings and thoughts in previous lives, that are not conducive to the experience of Brahman-Atman and to perform those that will lead to unity with Brahman-Atman sometime in the future. This process goes on until liberation from the phenomenal world is complete. Liberation, then, can be construed as death. This does not mean, however, that a man must die physically on attainment of liberation. He may still remain in his physical body. Once that particular physical cycle comes to an end, however, the need to be reborn no longer exists. In other words, as long as one is attached to the appearance, as long as one desires to accomplish things in the realm of the phenomenal world, one will be reborn. This need or desire is, of course, due to Maya/Avidya.

Two points, usually criticized, require qualification. The first is, that if the mind and indriyas do not disintegrate with the physical body, why then do we not remember our previous existences? The Advaitan would answer

that even during one lifetime we cannot consciously remember our appearance at particular times, nor can we consciously remember the motivation behind particular actions. As far as the second point is concerned, some may ask, how is it possible to assume a new body, without completely obliterating the personality of one's previous existence? The Advaitan might answer that changes in one's outer appearance do not necessarily imply change of oneself. For example, our province, Alberta, remains the same, though its appearance changes with each season; my dog remains the same, though he sheds one coat and acquires a new one twice a year; I remain the same, though I may change my clothes ten times a day.

To summarize the main points about Moksha, we can say the following. Moksha is a state of awareness, the attainment of which is a long process, not limited by physical death. Further, Moksha is attained from within oneself and not through an external agent. Finally, the attainment of Moksha is an individual process, whereby he who strives for it is liberating himself from the phenomenal world and approaching unity with Brahman-Atman. In striving for Moksha, one is always in the process of becoming more spiritual and less attached to one's actions, feelings and thoughts. Attachment

to actions, feelings and thoughts is the condition of the jiva. Because of this condition, the jiva is in bondage. The aim is liberation from bondage and unity with Brahman-Atman. The next question we may ask is, by what means can one attain liberation?

Practical Spiritual Disciplines

The Advaitan philosopher, as indeed all Indian philosophers, is not satisfied with a merely intellectual comprehension of reality. As Shankara repeatedly asserts, discursive intellect cannot grasp reality in its entirety. The scriptures cannot be understood by mere logical quibbling. (29) They whose minds are determined by logical quibbling are to be pitied, because they do not really know the tradition of the Vedanta. (30) We must be careful not to identify what Shankara means by knowledge with intellectual knowledge in our terms. Knowledge in the Advaitan's terms should be interpreted as wisdom, which, while including intellectual knowledge, is by no means limited by it. Practical discipline is also part of this concept of knowledge. The task of knowing is not a simple one, since it presupposes the highest development of the willing as well as the emotive aspects of the jiva. The practical, spiritual discipline is generally called "Yoga". In a more narrow

sense it has a dual meaning. It is "the union of the phenomenal self with Atman" as well as "the method" through which this union can be attained. Three types of Yoga are accepted by the Advaitans. Karma Yoga, the discipline involving the actions of man; Bhakti Yoga, involving the emotions and Jnana Yoga, involving reason. Jnana Yoga presupposes Bhakti Yoga and the latter presupposes Karma Yoga. All disciplines require an ideal goal, be that ideal action, perfect love, or total unity with Brahman-Atman.

Karma Yoga

The Advaita's insistence on Karma Yoga, as a preliminary discipline, implies the importance it attaches to the moral training of the seeker. Karma Yoga prescribes the steps to liberate man's will from the bondage imposed by Maya/Avidya. The object of ethical training is the overcoming of evil, which has its roots in selfish desires. Selfish desires seek immediate satisfaction. They make the individual ego-centric and blind the mind to its own higher potentialities, by confining it to the present alone.

In order to eliminate selfish desires, Karma Yoga prescribes as a first step certain optional and obligatory acts. The performance of optional acts serves as a deterrent to impulses, taming them and forcing them along socially

recognized channels. This implies an adjustment between the claims of the individual's uneducated, untamed ego, somewhat like Freud's "Id", and those of his developed ego, which is comparable to the Freudian "psyche". Still, the training of the will along those lines is only a preparatory measure in Karma Yoga. But it has a value, because without it, higher purposes cannot be worked out. In the next stage, that is, in the performance of obligatory acts, the need for the integration of the individual will with that of society becomes more pronounced. The ethical aim, as discussed in the Bhagavadgita, is to indicate a way of action, which, instead of fettering man's will, results in its emancipation. Action arising out of selfish desire is binding the individual to the phenomenal world. That is to say, the individual becomes a slave to the rewards or the fruits of his action. He sows in order that he may reap. In performing obligatory acts, the agent is helped to perform them without mentally clinging to their outcome. The agent's interests are widened to include those of the society in which he lives. Since the good is held to be a tendency to unification and evil a tendency to division, to act without regard for the narrow interests of the ego, is to realize the good and to avoid evil.

We should perhaps remember, at this point, that goodness is a quality of Saguna Brahman. This means that when man becomes good, he becomes one with goodness, the ideal value in respect to the will. The attainment of Nirguna Brahman presupposes identification with goodness. The demand of Karma Yoga is in fact a practical application in the field of ethics of the highest metaphysical principles. In renouncing the fruits of his actions in favour of society, the agent is giving concrete expression to his spiritual identity with all. What gives joy to others makes him also happy, because all together constitute one spiritual whole. Another noteworthy consequence of the performance of obligatory acts is the emphasis on duty rather than on rights. The Kantian imperative, of acting so that you use humanity in your own person as well as in any other always as an end and never as a means only, is here expressed.

Though the stage of acting in accordance with duty is a first major step towards liberating the will, there is still present an awareness of duality and therefore of the possibility of conflict. The object of the next stage in Karma Yoga is to pass beyond all possibilities of conflict, yet act effectively. The seeker takes a higher step when he realizes that he is not really the agent, because Atman

does not act at all. This realization cures man of vanity and pride in his good actions and brings about a greater detachment from his actions. While in the previous stage action was the result of a sense of duty, now it is inspired by the spirit of worship. It is Saguna Brahman or Ishvara, who performs the action, while man is only the instrument. Ishvara, in the Advaita, is Brahman as It appears to the individual. Each individual may have a personal god to whom he surrenders his will and whom he worships. Hence the plurality of gods. Just as there are many individual human beings, but collectively they are homo sapiens, so there are many "avatars" or "incarnations" of one and the same Ishvara. Ishvara appears in many forms and for the promotion of "dharma", "the law", as well as for the protection of the righteous.

Bhakti Yoga

Bhakti Yoga, like Karma Yoga, proceeds in stages. Generally two kinds of devotees are distinguished. Those who love the Lord, expecting a reward and those who love the Lord without a view to reward. They only seek to love for love's sake. One example of such motiveless love in Indian devotional literature is Shankara. In the latter stage the devotee reaches his highest goal. He becomes a "jnani-bhakta".

All "bhaktas", meaning "devotees", are considered noble, but the "jnani", he to whom divine reality is revealed through the grace of the Lord, leads them all. He is the very Self of the Lord. The content of this realization is: I am one with Ishvara or Saguna Brahman. Just as the purification of the will through good acts and its eventual merger in the will of the Lord entails expansion of consciousness in the direction of ethics, the purging of the emotions and their orientation towards a personal god, demand that aesthetic objects be treated as mirrors of the divine. Hence the wide-spread tendency to deify the grandeur of nature and offer it worship.

In summarizing the two disciplines discussed thus far, we could say that Karma Yoga culminates in the individual's identification with the goodness of the personal god, expressing the highest moral principle. Development then proceeds through the various stages of Bhakti Yoga to its culmination, which is identification with Ishvara and all His qualities, expressing the highest ethical as well as aesthetical principles, coupled with motiveless love.

Jnana Yoga

When the selfish desires are controlled by a God-directed will and the emotions harmonized with a God-centered universal love, the seeker is ready to proceed with the task of

realizing God as his very Self. So far the process was directed to the external world. Man has learned, through practice, how to give of himself unselfishly and with love. In Jnana Yoga the process is inwardly directed and requires in addition to the other qualities a strong capacity for reason. The Advaitan contends that self-realization can only be a knowing. Bondage, being the result of ignorance, can only be removed by knowledge. The path of knowledge is a difficult and lengthy process. The Advaitan holds that knowledge of Brahman-Atman cannot be attained without a qualified teacher, who is both a master of theory as well as a master of practice. Only a competent teacher can lead the seeker to the point where intuitive, direct awareness of Brahman-Atman is possible, though seldom actual.

The precondition of embarking upon the path of knowledge is renunciation of all possessions and all secular activities. This does not mean that the step taken is forced in any way. On the contrary, obligation or forced action would indicate that the seeker has not yet gone through the entire process of the previous spiritual disciplines and thus is not yet ready for the task before him. A spontaneous renunciation is required. Some of the special mental and emotional qualities, which all seekers after self-realization should

cultivate are detailed in the Bhagavadgita:

"Humility, sincerity, non-violence, forbearance, simplicity, devotion to the teacher, cleanliness, perseverance, self-conquest, aversion to sense objects, freedom from egotism, meditation on the evils of birth, death, old age, sufferings and pain, detachment from kith and kin as well as possession, equanimity in happiness and misery; devotion to God, love of solitude; pursuit of Self-knowledge and the vigilant awareness of the final end." (31)

From these initial preparations and with the help of a teacher, the seeker proceeds according to the Upanishadic injunction, of listening to, thinking about and understanding of Atman. This latter process involves the six valid means of knowledge (pramanas).

Ethical Principles

As is evident from our discussion of Yoga, the Advaitan admits to two paths to reality, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One has the tendency to externality and the other to introspection; one stimulates activity, the other draws to renunciation; one is centered in empirical experience, necessary and useful for practical life and the other leads to philosophic and spiritual enlightenment. This two-fold path has its sanction in the Vedas. It represents the evolutionary stages of man's consciousness. It would be a mistake to suppose that the Advaitans condemn phenomenal reality as illusory. On the contrary, they have,

again and again, emphasized its necessity and usefulness for practical life. No man in his everyday life can well neglect the body in which the Atman is encased. No man can, without harm to himself, ignore the environment in which he finds himself or discard his social and other relations and duties imposed on him. A personality, that is, a willing, feeling and knowing personality, is absolutely necessary to man for his onward development, intellectual, social, moral and spiritual. Without it his own development and ultimate self-realization, which is his goal, is impossible. The empirical knowledge, then, that man acquires in his initial stages of development, is not ignored by the Advaitan as unessential. Man, after all, has duties, purposes and ends in the phenomenal world, necessary for his social needs. But this empirical knowledge is not of a nature sufficiently far-reaching to guide man in the search for ultimate truth.

Ethics admittedly belong to the phenomenal sphere, having for their object the development of man in practical life, which necessarily presupposes the dualism of man and nature, finding their ultimate reconciliation and explanation in the Highest Reality, Ishvara, or by whatever other name that Reality may be called. The Advaitan recognizes man's

relations to Ishvara and his social and other relations to be in the sphere of relativity. He also demands that man first learn to do the duties which those relations imply and attain, by moral discipline, the highest ethical ideal, before he can be ready for philosophical and spiritual enlightenment. In its ethical system the Advaita Vedanta recognizes a principle, which is of the highest practical importance. Though spiritual truth, as philosophic truth, is of such nature that it can only be reached by a course of life and study leading to spiritual enlightenment, and though the spiritual ideals of different individuals vary according to cultural background and ability, there must be one basic truth, one highest ideal, which is capable of realization and which is justified by a common Theological and Philosophical view. All considerations, which introduce an element of variety in ethics are thus subordinated to the highest ideal of unity with Brahman-Atman, which should be the aim of every individual. In this view the Advaita is as practical in its ethical aspects as it is profound in its metaphysical aspects.

The principle of practical ethics is "abheda". Just as "advaita" means "oneness without a second", so "abheda" means "oneness without any distinction of I and thou and of

mine and thine". The word "abheda", when properly understood, means pure love and the principle denoted by it consists in altruistic action and not in selfish inaction or passivity, as is often supposed. The principle of "abheda" teaches man that he is not alone on earth and that his very existence and well-being are tied up with those of others. Wherever he may be he is one with all beings and bound to help them as they help him. His physical, emotional and mental survival depends on other living beings and he must, therefore, in common honesty live for them.

IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to acquaint us with the general concepts of the Advaita Vedanta, in order to point out its value, not only to philosophy and the philosopher, but also to the world community and to the individual.

Though all Indian philosophical schools, despite their difference, are oriented more to spiritual rather than material values, not every school was able to construct a system in which the two extremes of empirical and metaphysical truths meet and are transcended. The Advaita Vedanta was able to unite the two conflicting views of those who hold that the phenomenal world actually or possibly exists with the views of those who hold that what appears is not real and what is real is unknowable and also unspeakable. The Advaitan accepts completely neither of these conclusions. The Absolute, that is, Brahman-Atman is neither completely unrelated to or apart from the pluralistic nature of the phenomenal world, cognized by the empirical consciousness, nor is It completely submerged or lost in it. It rather transcends the reality of empirical consciousness, not by rejecting it as non-existent, but by recognizing it as a symbol of lack of a value, which finds its fulfillment in the unitive experience of Atmanic

consciousness.

The Advaitan view is synthetical in nature. It holds that man is faced with two situations. On the one hand there is disillusionment induced by the experience of an unenduring phenomenal plurality. On the other hand there is an indication of something beyond phenomenal reality, which provides the disillusioned consciousness with an idea or a notion of the enduring. According to Shankara, disillusionment reveals itself in knowing, willing and feeling. It is consequent upon the discovery of an object which is not self-luminous, that is, not transparent but opaque, of a will that is frustrated and of a feeling of dissatisfaction and restiveness, all of which are due to the subject-object dichotomy. Yet, the discovery that an object is not self-luminous, implies a self-luminous object and the discovery of a frustrated will, implies a will free of frustration. Finally a feeling of restiveness and discontent implies a state of contentment and peace. But neither the experience of disillusionment, nor its implication is completely satisfactory to man. The former leads to utter despair, while the latter, though intellectually satisfactory, is only a communication of the despair. This situation improves when we accept that disillusionment with

the pluralistic world only poses a question, that is, it is only a starting point of the inquiry into the real. This acceptance is marked by the dawn of reflective consciousness, which is born of reason and in which questions and counter-questions arise as to what is enduring. However, otherness, that is, the subject-object dichotomy, still persists. It attends the awareness of being in the phenomenal reality, on one hand, and of transcending it, on the other. The latter awareness, though it cancels out phenomenality and explains its inadequacy, still points to an object and therefore does not remove otherness. The synthesis occurs in a transformation from a differentiating point of view to a non-differentiating point of view; from knowledge and experience, characterized by the subject-object duality, to knowledge and experience, characterized by directness and immediacy.

The value of the Advaita, then, consists in its advocating a further step in the development of consciousness, namely, transcendence of the acceptable categories of knowledge. That is to say, it holds that intuitive, direct and immediate apprehension is a synthesis of sense perception and rational cognition. It also indicates that this type of apprehension is potential in all beings and that in man

the potential can be helped to develop by the rigorous discipline of his willing, emotive and intellectual capacities. A further point to be noted is, that intuitive apprehension is not held to be a kind of animal instinct. Though it arises out of instinct, it must proceed through the various diverse stages of consciousness, before it can become intuition.

Another point worthy of consideration is the Advaitan's use of language. Philosophy in India is not only considered to be a science, but also an art. Symbolic use of language, therefore, is a valid means of communication. While literal language is used as a means of communicating the nature of the thinkable, that is, as a means of describing and explaining phenomena, symbolic language is used for expressing that which is knowable, though not in thought, meaning the reality which is apprehended by direct, intuitive and immediate experience. Metaphysical truths cannot be entirely expressed in literal language. To attempt this is to render metaphysics nonsensical, because the structure of literal language coincides with the structure of empirical reality and is, therefore, applicable only in this sphere. In other words, the rules that govern phenomenal reality are not entirely applicable to metaphysical reality. Symbolic

language, on the other hand, is used to indicate, though not to describe or explain, metaphysical truths. The Advaitan's acceptance of symbolic language as a valid means for communicating metaphysical truths is indeed worthy of careful consideration by Western philosophers. The striving for acceptance of philosophy as a science in the West, has served to impoverish it of spiritual meaning. Consideration by philosophers of certain literary works, prose and poetry, and also of ancient myths, would enrich philosophy and also offer many clues to the solution of the problems facing philosophers of our generation.

Perhaps the most important point worthy of our consideration is the spiritually and individually oriented view of the Advaita Vedanta. At no other time was reappraisal of spiritual values so necessary in our society as it is now. Until very recent times most of the Western world lived smugly content, believing that mundane power and control are a mark of superiority and exclusiveness. It is suggested that this view arose out of two significant developments, namely, the institutionalizing of the Christian faith and the extensive intellectual and technological progress. The latter is to a great extent, I think, the secular continuation of the former. With the transformation

of simple Christian faith into a mundane power, the spiritual meaning of the teachings of Christ, who never aspired to a heavenly kingdom on earth, moved into the background. This occurrence may possibly have had a twofold effect on Western man, from the consequences of which he may still not have recovered.

It removed the possibility from the individual of developing his spiritual potential and it developed a dependence on an authority, which, though human, claimed to represent God on earth. The consequences of this were, that man no longer needed to search for an ultimate reality. The authority qualified to enact the will of God on earth supplied him with the answers, which were meant to ensure his spiritual well-being. Man no longer needed to fear, to despair, to suffer and to search. All he was required to do was to have faith in the interpretations of Christianity by the authority and to act according to the rules set out for him to follow. Not faith in God and even less understanding of God, but faith in the intermediary, a mundane power, became the faith of the Western man.

Another consequence was, that man redirected, rechanneled his spiritual potential from searching for ultimate reality to pursuits in the phenomenal world. This eventually

resulted in a kind of deification of intellectual and material things. Subsequent disillusionment with the various representatives of the Church served to decentralize the authority, resulting in a multiplicity of intellectual interpretations of one and the same faith, each opposing the other. Fragmentation and strife in the religious sphere and the layman's increasing attention to intellectual and material pursuits, eventually brought about the transition of power from clerical to secular authority. No great psychological adjustment was needed. Man, dissatisfied with one mundane authority turned to another. The re-channeling of man's spiritual potential was so complete that had he felt a spiritual need, he would no longer have recognized it as such. His dependence on external authority was such that he no longer felt the need to invert, to seek answers within himself. Though the authority changed from church to state to science and technology and to material wealth, Western man remained fairly consistent in his alienation from his own spiritual potential.

Can we claim Christian or any other spirituality as our heritage? I think that we cannot. For Christian spirituality died in Rome and Byzantium and any other spirituality never had a chance to develop. What we can

claim is intellectual discussion about spirituality and God. The few thoughtful individuals who attempted to awaken a God consciousness in Western man, have either been punished for it or misinterpreted or ridiculed or simply ignored. Only in recent years have an increasing number of individuals begun to be aware of a lack, a void, left, no doubt, by the realization of the fallability of authorities and institutions in which we believed. They have become aware, that, though we have accomplished much in intellectual and technological spheres, we still lack a spiritual unity, which would bind together our various interests. That is to say, that life for us seems to have many minor meanings of an unenduring character, but no one supreme meaning. Furthermore, due to our one-sided development, we have become spiritually alienated from the rest of the world, from nature and from ourselves. From this it follows that a reorientation to spiritual matters and metaphysics, not only in philosophy and theology, but in all pursuits of our society, is necessary if we and the rest of the world are to survive. For our lacks have also endangered the survival of the rest of the world community.

Consideration for Indian philosophies in general and a monistic philosophy, such as the Advaita, in particular, may

provide us, if not with spirituality, then at least with a method for attaining it. India, though poor materially, abounds in spiritual wisdom. We, who are aware of the lack of spiritual wisdom in our society, may want to agree with the thoughtful pronouncement made by Max Mueller in his lectures at the University of Cambridge:

"If I were asked under what sky the human mind has mostly developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which will deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant - I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, we who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thought of Greeks and Romans, and one of the Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact, more truly human - a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life - again I should point to India". (32)

DIAGRAM 1
EVOLUTION - THE 5 SHEATHS

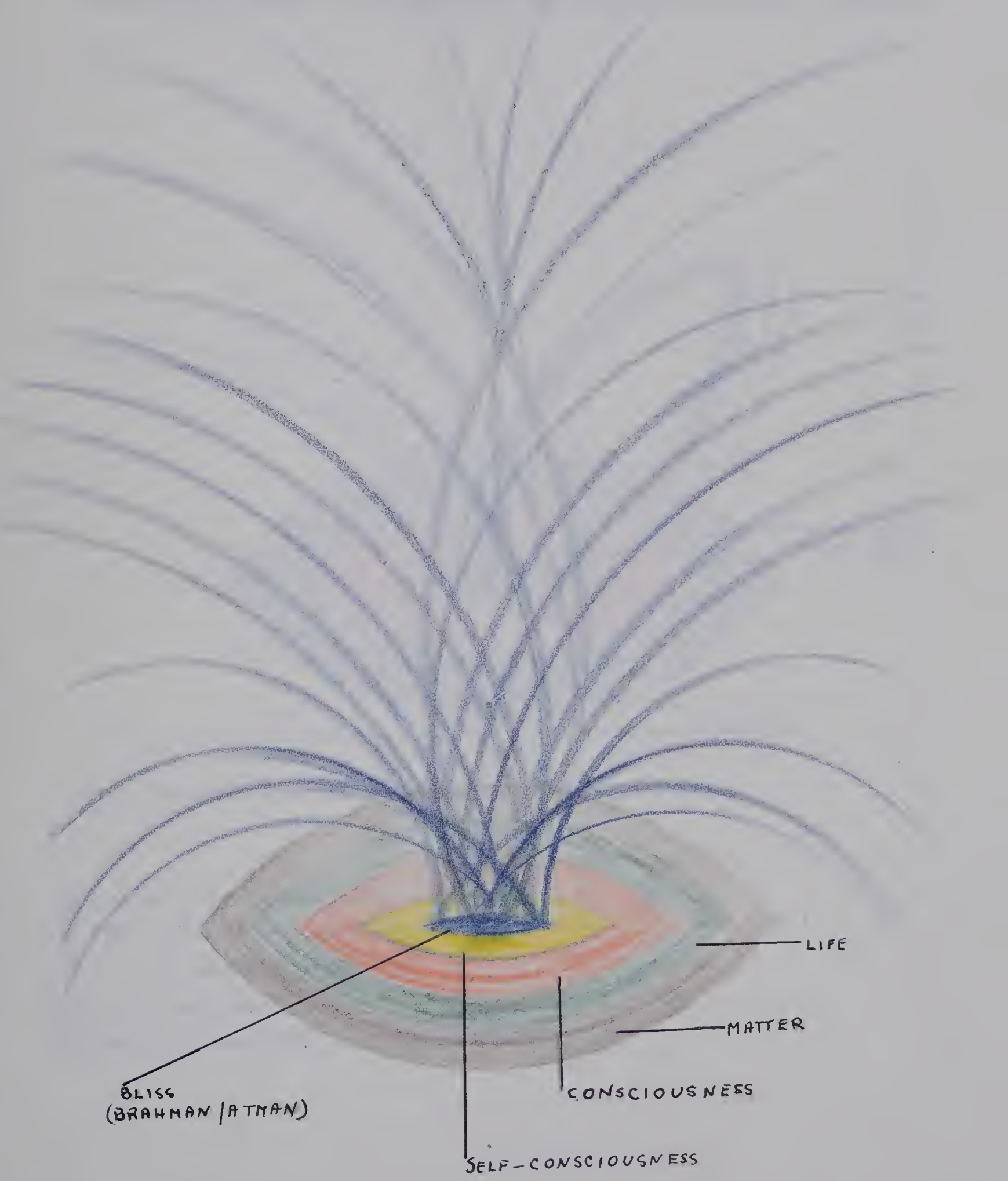
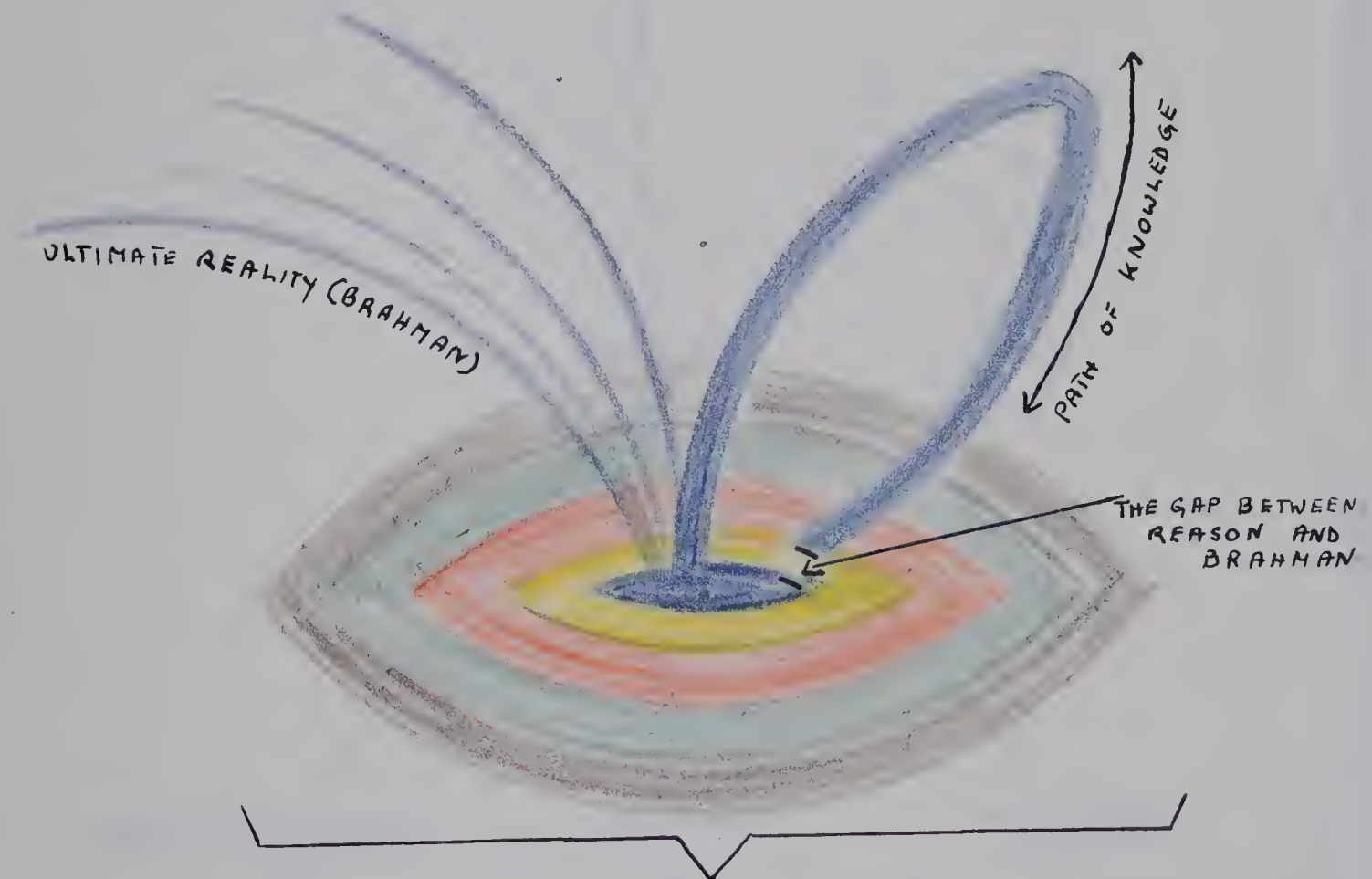


DIAGRAM 2

81

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAHMAN, KNOWLEDGE AND THE 5 SHEATHS



OUR PHENOMENAL WORLD OR INDIVIDUAL PHENOMENAL BEING

- KNOWER SELF (ATMAN / BRAHMAN / BLISS)
- SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS (REASON)
- CONSCIOUSNESS (INSTINCT)
- LIFE (ANIMATE)
- MATTER (INANIMATE)

DIAGRAM 3
CONSCIOUSNESS

82

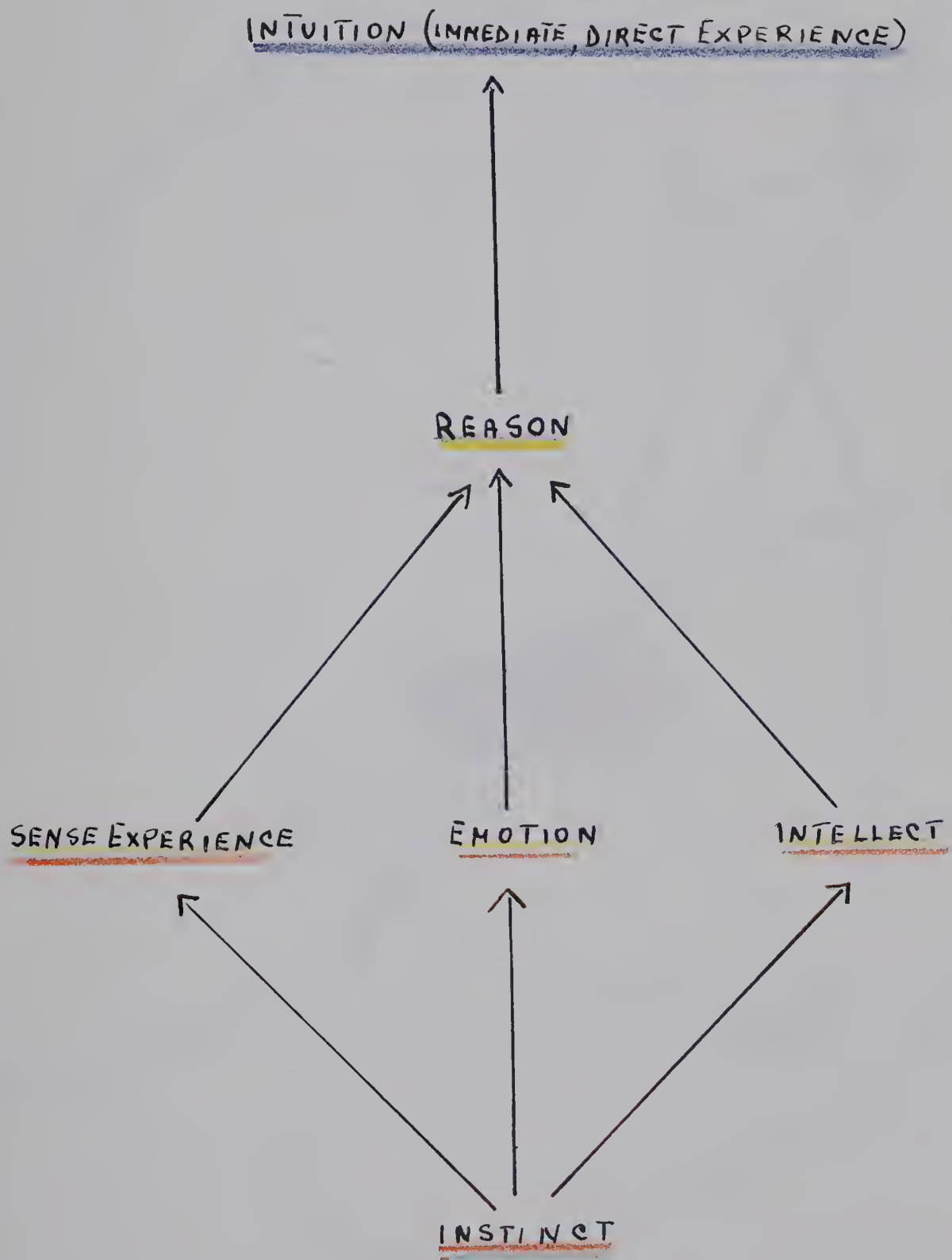
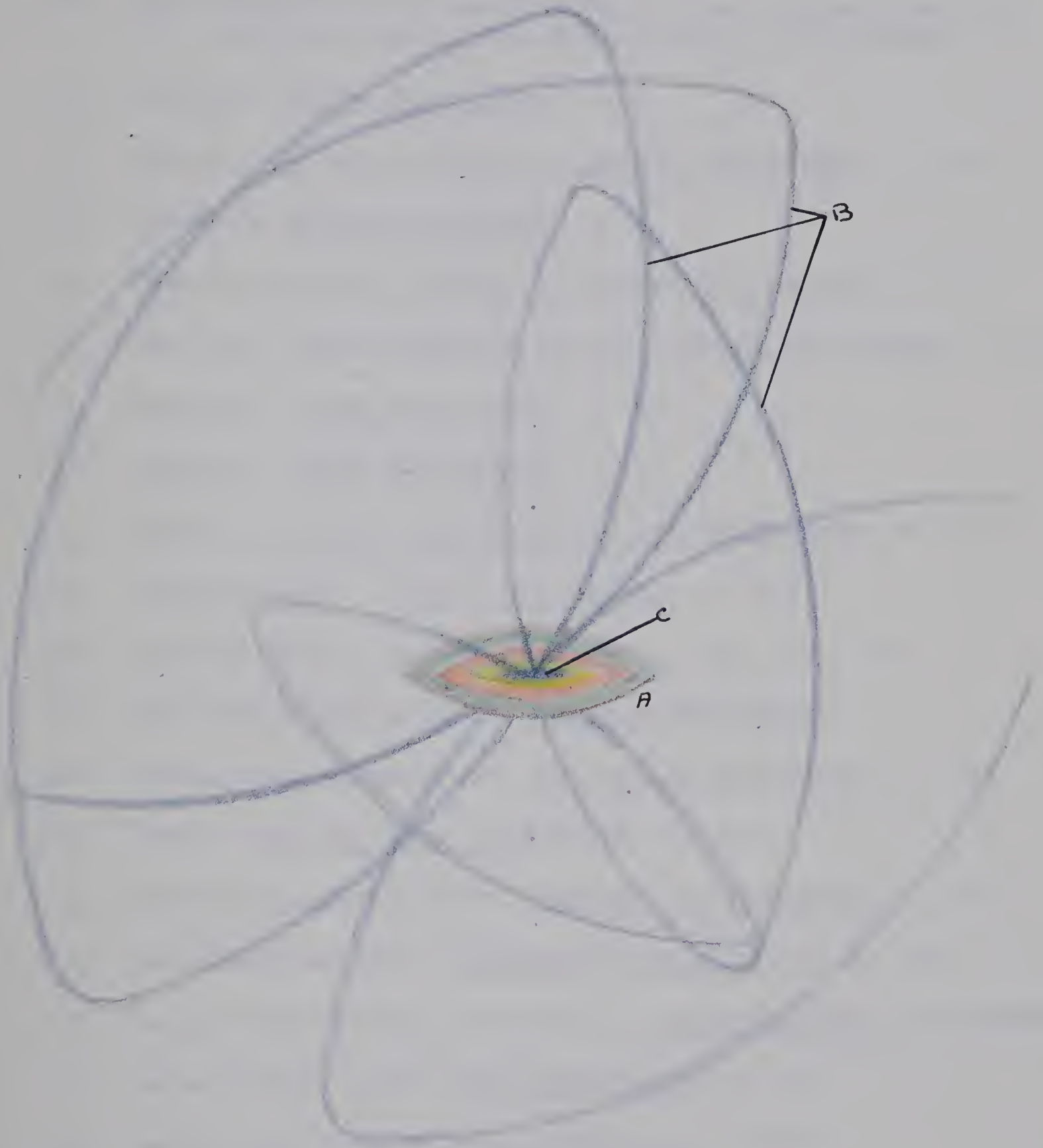


DIAGRAM 4

83

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAHMAN AND ATMAN



- A. PHENOMENAL REALITY (THE WORLD OR THE INDIVIDUAL BEING)
- B. BRAHMAN
- C. ATMAN

FOOTNOTES

- (N) The Sanskrit words in this thesis were transliterated into English without benefit of diacritical marks.
- (1) Bernard, Hindu Philosophy, p. 3
- (2) Sharma, Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, p. 13
- (3) Bernard, Hindu Philosophy, p. 4
- (4) Sharma, Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, p. 13
- (5) Mueller, Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy, p. 13
- (6) Bernard, Hindu Philosophy, p. 20
- (7) Bernard, Hindu Philosophy, p. 43
- (8) Sharma, Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy, p. 169
- (9) Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, p. 338
- (10) Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, pp. 446, 447
- (11) Dharmaraja Adhvarindra, Vedanta-Paribhasha.
- (12) Swami Satprakashananda, Methods of Knowledge, p. 154
- (13) Datta, The Six Ways of Knowing, p. 243
- (14) Swami Satprakashananda, Methods of Knowledge, p. 190
- (15) Swami Vivekananda, Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 181
- (16) Swami Nikhilananda, (Transl.), The Upanishads, pp. 266-269
- (17) Swami Nikhilananda, The Upanishads, p. 32
- (18) Swami Nikhilananda, The Upanishads, p. 200
- (19) Date, Vedanta Explained, Vol. II, III, ii, 22, pp. 144-146
- (20) Date, Vedanta Explained, Vol. II, III, ii, 23, pp. 148-149

FOOTNOTES (cont'd.)

- (21) Otto, The Idea of the Holy, p. 189
- (22) Date, Vedanta Explained, IV, iii, 14, p. 386
- (23) Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy, Vol. 2, p. 545
- (24) Swami Nikhilananda, The Upanishads, pp. 210 - 213
- (25) Mueller, Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy, p.22
- (26) Swami Nikhilananda, The Upanishads, p. 208
- (27) Swami Nikhilananda, The Upanishads, p. 165
- (28) Sankara, Brahma-Sutra Bhasya, Ch. I, Sec. I
- (29) Sankara, Chhandogya Bhasya, VIII, 12.i.
- (30) Sankara, Brihadaranyaka Bhasya II, 1, 20.
- (31) Bhagavadgita, XIII, 7 - 11
- (32) Mueller, India: What Can It Teach Us? p. 6

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